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A CONVERSATION ON RELIGION WITH JON MEACHAM AND SALLY Q



STARHAWK

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"On Faith" panelist Starhawk is a prominent voice in modern Wiccan spirituality and cofounder of *Reclaiming* (www.reclaiming.org), an activist branch of modern Pagan religion. She is the author or coauthor of ten books, including *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) --considered an essential text for the Neo-Pagan movement--and the novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993). [more »](#)

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Obama Casting a Good and Needed Spell

"I'm asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to make real change in Washington...I'm asking you to believe in yours."

That's the message on the top of Obama's website—a message of faith, belief and empowerment. It speaks well, both of him and of us, that his message is receiving such a strong response.

And he stands as an example of real, personal courage. Who can hear him without hearing echoes of Kennedy, King, and others who have inspired us and been slain for it?

Barack Obama is speaking to country in terms of vision and hope, and calling us to be our best selves. If that inspires fervor, it speaks to the deep hunger people have for someone who can evoke our passion and awaken our belief that we can actually live up to our highest values. We've had decades of politicians preaching doctrines of cynicism and selfishness, of lies and bullying and divisive attacks, and people are sick of it. We face issues that are intractable, overwhelming and terrifying, from the morass in Iraq to the specter of global ecological collapse, and we know deep inside ourselves that we desperately have to do something different than we have ever done before. How powerful, then, to have someone stand forth and say, simply, "Yes, we can!"

If politicians hired Witches or magicians as consultants, we'd tell them that your deep mind responds to positive words and images, and doesn't get 'no'. Linguist and political theorist George Lakoff makes the same point in his book *Don't Think of An Elephant*. You can't not think of an elephant—because as soon as you say the word 'elephant', that image fills your mind.

Magically speaking, then, Obama is casting a good spell. Whether he wins or loses, he's filling the psychic and emotional atmosphere with words like 'healing' and 'hope'. The effect is like a clean breeze blowing through a morass of stinking, noxious fumes. People want to believe, because they like the way he makes them feel about themselves.

The other candidates are going to have a hard time countering that message unless they can also articulate a vision at least as strong. We've got John McCain looking like everybody's Scowling Dad saying, basically, "No, you can't!" And we've got Hillary Clinton going on the offense saying, "Don't trust him." Neither message is exactly a rallying cry.

In this country, we ask our politicians to do four main things: to make policy, to defend the country, to be

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good administrators, and to carry a huge load of our archetypal projections, embodying our hopes, fears, dreams and aspirations. The first three tasks are rational, the last goes much deeper. It falls into the realm of what we Witches call 'magic'—the 'art of changing consciousness at will.'

Obama evokes some powerfully appealing archetypes. Think of all those myths and fairy tales about the humble-seeming outsider who turns out to be the true king, throwing out the corrupt rulers and restoring health and healing. We're a contradictory people—we love underdogs, while we despise losers—but there's nothing we love more than the little guy who comes from behind and beats all the odds to win the pennant.

In the contest of archetypes, women are at a disadvantage, facing a deep, unconscious sexism that limits our collective imagination. We so easily turn into Mom, either Nagging Mom, or Bitch Mom who doesn't really love us, or harried, responsible but dull Mom, complaining about how she does all the real work while sexy, divorced Dad just takes the kids to Disneyland. My personal sympathies lie deeply with Mom's cause. She does do all the diaper changing and the homework while Dad breezes in for Ski Week and holidays. But if I were Hillary Clinton's campaign advisor, I'd tell her, stay away from that archetype. Responsible Mom is not going to win over Aragorn the Exiled King. Instead, I would urge, be Joan of Arc. Find your vision, and be so passionately driven by it that you would stand forth and challenge kings and armies. Show us your courage, which we know you have. Tell us "I stood forth and went into realms where few women dared to go, because I care so deeply about the welfare of all of us."

Whatever you do, don't attack Obama on issues of faith and trust. Doing so will be just as effective as warning your teenage daughter that the sexy biker she's fallen in love with has no history of gainful employment.

As for me, I do believe, as Obama urges us to—not in his or any politician's ability to make change, but in ours. If we as a people find our own vision, and speak, march, lobby, write, push for it and enact it in every way we can, then this moment of fear and crisis can become a turning point. We face huge losses in the years to come, and to get through them we need trust and connection in one another, courage, creativity, and compassion. None of that arises out of cynicism and despair. All of it comes only when we begin by believing, "Yes, we can!"

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